6/24/72

Dear Js,

Had very decent young Howard not called me night before last, I'd planned to get my mind on something else for a while to make a note the contents of which I thought might amuse you a bit. Back in 1965, when I last saw Muriel Ruckeyser, then a peacenik poet, she would not lift a finger to help but she urged me to keep a daily ledger because of the historic importance, etc., and because there might later be literary interest, etc. It was a disappointment to me that neither she nor any others, including the likes of Robert Lowell("I'd have to read the Warren Report and all 26 volumes before I could write an honest foreword" to my second book, which had been asked of him by a young reporter friend). I had met her one wild drunken night in the 30s at a party in New York. After the passing of so many years, I recall only that it had been a pleasant night and my next-days regrets, I was that drunk before it was over. Anyway, as things do, I was reminded of a fragment of the past and a note of something I might want to use in future writing, for which I hope to have time after assassination work, by the 10 days of rain we've had. A few moments ago I saw what looked like it might be the beginning of a sunrise. If that has disappeared, it still doesn't look like more rain now and I'll take a walk for the first time in 10 days. I findI miss 'em if I don't walk in the early morning.

Funny how things come back. They are talking on the radio about how this is the highest water in Washington since 1936. I remember that one. I had a bad cold and retired with my favorite remedy of those days, a pint mixed into a pint of boiling water to which I'd added a dozen swueezed lemons or a half-dozen and probably some sugar, all of it in a Thermos, me in bed, and I drank the whole thing while listening to radio reports of the flood. Wasn't as bad a s orm or flood as one when I was still in Wilmington, about 1931 or 2. I was working for Pierre DuPont's Morning News. I had had an accident and all the fingers of my right had were stitched on the top side. Couldn't type without much difficulty. We got the east end of a hurricane and it tore things up pretty badly. I walked into the paper dhen the center was over us, a pause of some kind, got there to find no communications south at all, no kind to anywhere, and I offered to use radio. I was then a radio ham, with a simple but highly-efficient outfit that was the envy of some of the older ones who bought expensive rigs and got low effeciency. I worked 80-meter phone, no code. For this I needed more power and code, the interference making comprehension impossible. The managing editor, generally an unimaginative , surly sorty, went for it.

He had married one of my favorite teachers, Annie McLaurie, who had taught me 5th-grade geogrpahy, and I always wondered about a sweet woman like her marrying an ill-temepered cuss whose sole merit was total sycophancy.

Let me digress for what may also amuse. There cam a time that Pierre himself was a witness before the Senate Munitions Committee. I didn't know it or her then, but Lil worked for it. Of course, the home folks weren t supposed to know about such things unless they were so radical they bought the conservative Phila. papers. So, Charlie Gray had the job of finding something to enable him to downplay this embarrassing appearance by the owner. He got the copy boy, Don Hutchinson - I think he later got famous in tennie - gave him a buck, and told him to go to different drug stores and take two aspirins with a coke. You got a coke for a nickel then. Twenty cokes later Don came back with an upset stomach and said if he had to take another he'd quit. So, Charlie, personally, then with others helping, hit the horn and interviewed the governor (son-in-law of owner), mayor, head of board of education, school principals, etc., and soon had a very black bannered story on this new intoxicating vice of the young. He foubd enough room on p.1 for a half-stick saying that Pierre had that day given the Senate the benefit of his great wisdom.

The closest ham to the station-and in that weather, this was important, was a chiropodist only two blocks away. Howard Layton operated W3AIS out of the back room of the third floor of his home. No patients in such weather, so he was willing I guess I've got the time wrong, must have gone in on the time of the p.m. mate, same owndership, same bldg. I remember that almost immediately Howard raised a ham in Berlin, Md., which is just below the bottom of Delaware on the eastern shore. Right before that he got what for a ham was an electrifying thing, a call from what was then a very famous station, the Navy's Arlingon NAA. We were the only thing they heard and damned if they didn't give us some authority that somebody without the authority to bestow it must have made up. Howard and I were both given temporary commission in the Navy! Lieutenants! We moved some official traffic. Phila was then an important Navy base, for example.

Strange how I remember names, call-letters, things like that so clearly after so much of my life.

Around midday we raised this Berling signal and he had some traffic. The interference was pretty rough. Howard wrote out what he could make out in longhand and passed it to me, sheet at a time. I remember I was sitting at his right, toward a north window, and that they had one of the old stand-type phones with a separate receiver for hearing, the long kind, close to there and that I used it. As soon as I saw the fragment, I knew he was getting a damned good storm story, first-person. As I now recall it dealth with homes, including the writer's, washing down a creek that was swollen enough to make them float.

I called the Daily News, the companion paper, got a real character who was then city editor, Harris Samonisky. The two papers in those days, between them, had few editors. Each had an editor. The one on the morning side was senile and in pasture. He'd cadge various of us into writing editorials for him. I wrote quite a few, chiefly those I wanted to write, and the old fellow like me for volunteering, never catching on to my serving self-interest. Each had a managing editor, a city and a state editor, and one for sports and women's. Each of the latter had one under him/her. The only human being among them was Carl Wise, my city editor. He was wise, kind, soft-spoken and fatherly to me. We'd ride home together often in the night's last streetcar, living not far apart.

Harris Samonisky was p.m. city ed. He smoked cigars and imitated the Ben-Hecht types. Acted and talked tough, etc. Made himself seem important to himself. I told Harris what I had and he put a steno on the phone. Meanwhile, I had pretty much of the story to write as I read it. It was really an improvisation, for much of it was lost in transmission. But it was that rare good job by the man who to this day I've never met that I could and did throw myself into it and I'm pretty confident that I added approximately what had been lost, the essence of what he'd written.

The end product was a really great story. I knew it and it mademe feel good, through the hand pain. The rain was bucketing down when at suppertime I walked back to the paper while Howard finally yielded to his wife and stopped to eat. I was astounded to find that the p.m.er hadn't carried this story and that we didn't have it for the a.m. The man who wrote it was our correspondent. His name was Vharlie Truitt or Pruitt. Charlie Gray was pretty mad. We found out later that Harris had phoned it to the Bulletin, which had made it the lead story. I'll keep you in suspense for a bit. I went back to Howard's until he pooped out, then I used a series of hams the same way for two days, around the clock, until land communications were restored. And then I pooped out. This came back to me recently at my step-father's funeral when my youngest niece asked me if it were true that her mother, my younger sister, used to wake me up by jumping on me. It was true, as my sister had told the kids. Sometimes it was impossible to awaken me. Gloria, 12 years youngerm often started running at the dorr to my bedroom and just belly-flopped on me when a shake didn't get me up. After that storm, it was early on a Saturday a.m. when I got home, nobody could get me up, not even this treatment. They actually got the family doctor. I slept until son time Sunday with everybody worrying even after the doctor told them not to.

The story part of which I wrote as I read it- the copy was coming to me at about 20 words per minute and I kept up with it - won the Pulitzer Prize that year. For the firt time and I suspect the only Charlie Gray had a kind word for me. He raged that our paper, Charlie and he even included me, should have won the prize. Indeed we should have. Harris got fired and went to work, as I later heard, whether or not beginning there, for Carl Byoir. That's the kind of place he really belonged. Even whore newspapers were too decent for him. Harris couldn't sell the story to the Bulle because Truitt was their correspondent, too, but he expected to get some pay and probably did. And now you know how I didn't win part of the Pulitzer. When I was 18-20. If Harris hadn't been a crook, I'd still be the youngest, I suspect...,Years later I met Truitt's sone, then a reporter. I was near his day, then manager of the Baltimore Sun's Salisbury, Md., TV station. Lil and I were at a poultry affair. I told the son the story. I was surprised that I never got word from him or his dad, that when I was in the same city the dad didn't even want to meet the man who had made it possible for him to win the Pulitzer. I then did not look him up. Had I not met the son, I would have. And now that I've also made Lil her mate and she is awake and sipping it in bed, our morning ritual, I'm taking a walk. Haven't finished your mailing I got yesterday and when I get back from the walk the light will be ok for posting corrections on the master of PM. It may be a futility, but it also must now be done fast, on the remote chance something can happen as a result of the pending dirty-wrok. Best,